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UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000197

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR -- MSEIBEL, WHA/PD - APRUITT, HAITI  
MONITORING TASK FORCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A

TAGS: PREL MARR KPAO NS

SUBJECT: SURINAMESE FOREIGN MINISTER LEVENS EXPRESSES SUPPORT FOR CARICOM'S POSITION ON HAITI; CORPORAL TELLS PRESS SURINAME'S "BLUE HELMET UNIT" READY TO SERVE

REFS: (A) PARAMARIBO 183, (B) PARAMARIBO 159

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SUMMARY

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11. Following her return from a visit to China, Surinamese Foreign Minister, Marie Levens announced publicly that Suriname stands behind CARICOM on Haiti and is concerned about allegations made by ex-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide that the US forced him out of Haiti. Levens suggested that if the US used strong-armed tactics in Haiti, the US could apply these tactics to any country. In other reactions to Haiti, a junior military soldier proclaimed that the Surinamese contingent of a UN Blue Helmet Unit, which had been deployed to Haiti previously, is ready to serve there once again. He accused the government and the Armed Forces of neglecting the specially-trained unit and of failing to establish a crisis center to receive Haitian refugees. By calling attention to these issues with his unauthorized remarks, the soldier hoped to pressure the government to take a proactive stance toward the Haitian crisis; instead, he is likely to face disciplinary action.  
End Summary.

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FOREIGN MINISTER LEVENS ON HAITI  
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12. Upon her return from a state visit to China, Foreign Minister Marie Levens publicly expressed support for the CARICOM position on Haiti, namely CARICOM's concerns over ex-Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's allegations that the US had forced him to leave Haiti. According to the March 5 edition of local daily "De Ware Tijd," Levens stated that, despite its absence at the March 3-4 emergency session convened by CARICOM President/Jamaican Prime Minister Percival Patterson in Kingston, Suriname was kept abreast of the deliberations, had studied CARICOM's position, and had written to CARICOM to offer support on the matter. Levens was quoted as saying, "if it can happen in Haiti, it can happen anywhere," echoing sentiments voiced by Patterson at a March 4 press conference.

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JUNIOR MILITARY PERSONNEL: MY UNIT IS READY TO GO TO HAITI  
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13. Leven's comments followed press reports of a junior enlisted soldier's March 3 proclamation that the Surinamese contingent of a "United Nations Blue Helmet force" is ready to serve in Haiti. The soldier, Corporal Dennis Duiker, told the press that the 31-member unit would like to put to use its United Nations training. Moreover, Duiker pointed out that the unit brings experience to the table, not just training, referring to the unit's deployment to Haiti in 1995. Duiker criticized the Surinamese Armed Forces and the government for their alleged neglect of his unit and failure to establish a crisis center to receive Haitian refugees as yet. In closing, Duiker expressed hope that his public statements would press the government to begin preparations to receive Haitian refugees.

14. Note: The DATT spoke to a military contact who confirmed that in 1995, one military police squad and three squads of infantry personnel were deployed to Haiti. Upon its return to Suriname, the unit was disbanded and its members returned to their branches. The contact also said that the corporal would be disciplined for making unauthorized statements to the press. End Note.)

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COMMENT

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15. Given Suriname's penchant to fall in line with CARICOM's pronouncements and to call in to question US motives, Marie Leven's comments on Haiti come as no surprise. Her sentiments do not seem to be shared by all Surinamers, however, as exhibited by the editorial line of Suriname's

leading news dailies, which take a much more objective line

on Aristide's claims. The boldness exhibited by military personnel like Corporal Duiker and Major Goerdeyel (See Ref B) in discussing foreign policy matters with the press, however, is surprising and troubling. These incidents display the GOS' weak civilian control over the military -- a non-laughing matter given Suriname's turbulent history -- and a general willingness by GOS officials to speak freely to the press without taking into account possible negative repercussions. End Comment.

16. Minimize considered.

FAUCHER

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